

Gordon Institute

1886 – 1951

Details

The Gordon Institute, Melbourne, was established in 1886. It offered boys classes and a place to socialise. The Institute aimed to find boys work placements in the country, but did accommodate some boys aged 5 to 14. In 1951, new facilities were opened in Highett, and the institution became known as the Gordon Home for Boys.

The Gordon Institute was established in 1886, but was founded formally on 17 May 1888. It was located in Bowen Street, Melbourne, 'not far from the Working Men's College'. The Institute's object was 'to rescue children from criminal ways by attracting them from evil associations and pastimes to the premises'.

The Institute was established following the efforts of William Mark Forster (who was also a key figure in the establishment of the Try Society).

In 1889, Forster and Charles Deynes Barber were approved under s.62 of the Neglected Children's Act 1887 'as persons to whose care neglected children may be committed'. Barber was the superintendent at the Gordon Institute from 1890 to 1902. Subsequently Rev James Gibson and Miss Emilie Walker were in charge (Gibson only until 1904, he remained as an office bearer with the Gordon Institute).

The Gordon Institute provided a place for lads to spend their evenings and also gave them the opportunity to attend classes. These classes provided the boys with the opportunity to enjoy the 'companionship of chaste and graceful women', giving these waifs a 'veritable moral uplift – a view of the angels', according to the *Spectator* newspaper in 1899.

The Gordon Institute also provided accommodation for some boys, but its main objective was to find boys placements in the country. Barber addressed a meeting in 1897 about treating 'neglected' children, recommending that boys be placed at small farm/reformatories. He reported that the Gordon Institute had already seen much success with placements at the Wandin South farm of Melbourne businessman Albert Wiseman.

The Institute firmly believed that the 'rescue' of boys was ideally effected by removing them from the environment of the city. Swain writes that 95% of the Gordon Institute's boys were placed in the country, mainly in sparsely settled areas on the Murray and in the Wimmera. She writes that adjusting to the new rural environment and the tasks the boys were expected to perform for their employers was very difficult for many.

The Gordon Institute's procedures for placing its boys in the country was described in depth in an article from 1899:

When a farmer makes application to Mr Barber for a lad he must comply with the conditions under which these boys are sent out – conditions laid out under the operation of the Child Protection Act. They are given with some fullness here, but only so as to prevent their having to be repeated elsewhere. The lad

must, first of all, be properly fed and housed, which is generally a new experience for him; further, he must be taken regularly to the employers' Church and its Sunday School, and be placed under the pastoral care of the employer's clergyman. Intoxicating drinks and tobacco are prohibited as far as possible, as along the lines of these evils so many lads walk and fall.

Payment for services must be regularly made according to written agreement. A quarterly account is made out against the employer, and he (after deducting amounts actually paid for clothing, specified pocket-money etc) sends the balance to the Institute, whereupon the money is banked to the credit of the lad, and he is at once fully informed of the transaction.

Every applicant for a lad must be certified to as being a suitable person to whom one of these lads may with confidence be sent. When a receipt is sent to the lad, as referred to in the preceding paragraph, he gets the following good advice: 'Try to save as much as you can, so that you may have plenty when you are old enough to start a business, and provide for times of sickness and old age'.

Dealing with what are called uncontrollable boys is made a special feature at the Gordon Institute. Under the firm but kind discipline of Mr Barber and co-adjutors, these boys come to realize that laws are for their good, and that their own welfare is bound up in being God-fearing, law-abiding, industrious members of the community.

The Children's Court was accommodated at the Gordon Institute from 1908 to 1941.

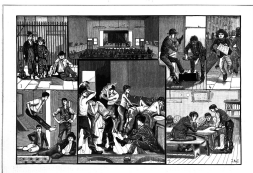
The buildings were taken over by the government in 1941 for wartime purposes, and Gordon Institute boys were temporarily housed at the Burwood Boys' Home.

In 1951, new facilities were opened in Highett, and the institution became known as the Gordon Home for Boys.

National Redress Scheme for people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse

In 2021, the Victorian government has agreed to be a funder of last resort for this institution. This means that although the institution is now defunct, it is participating in the National Redress Scheme, and the government has agreed to pay the institution's share of costs of providing redress to a person (as long as the government is found to be equally responsible for the abuse a person experienced).

Gallery



At the Gordon Institute

Description: Published in the *Australasian Sketcher*.

More info

Chronology

- **Gordon Institute (1886 – 1951)**
 - Gordon Homes for Boys (1951 - 1969)
 - The Gordon Homes for Boys and Girls (1969 - 2000)

- [GordonCare for Children \(2000 - 2013\)](#)

Related Entries

Related Legislation

- [The Neglected Children's Act 1887, Victoria \(1888 - 1890\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Burwood Boys' Home \(1895 - c. 1972\)](#)
During the years of World War Two, boys from the Gordon Institute were accommodated at the Burwood Boys' Home, as the Institute's building in Bowen Street, Melbourne, was taken over by the government for wartime purposes.
Date: 1941 -
- [The Try Society \(c. 1883 - current\)](#)
The Try Society and the Gordon Institute were both established in part due to the efforts of W. M. Forster.
- [Children's Court of Victoria \(1906 - current\)](#)
The Children's Court was situated at the Gordon Institute from 1908 to 1941.
- [Wandin Yallock Reformatory School \(1886 - 1905\)](#)
Some boys from the Gordon Institute were transferred to Wandin Yallock Reformatory School

Resources

- Gherardin, Walter, *The Gordon Homes : a history and tribute*, 2001
- Crotty, Martin, *Boy Rescue Societies*, eMelbourne: the city past and present, 2008
- Gordon Institute for Boys, *You might study this awhile, Gordon boys*, 1904
- Gordon Institute for Boys, *Gordon Boys*, 1904 - 1925
- Duff, G.B., *Social work of the Church: child rescue agencies of Melbourne*, The Spectator, 23 June 1899
- [Wards of the State. An astonishing number. How are they dealt with?](#), The Argus, 13 January 1911
- [Gordon Institute](#), Finding Records, No date. *Relevance*: See the 'List of records held by the department' section for information about records relating to Gordon Institute
- [Our Illustrations: The Gordon Institute - Good Work Among the Boys](#), Weekly Times, 8 August 1903

Records

For more information and to access your records, follow the links below:

Records

- [William Forster Try Boys' Society Records \(1887 - 1986\)](#)
 - [Records of Gordon Homes for Boys and Girls, \[manuscript\] \(c. 1887 - c. 1947\)](#)
 - [Voluntary Children's Homes Files \(1921 - 1989\)](#)
 - [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)
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